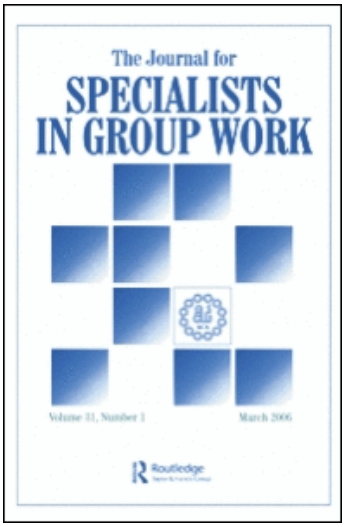

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Using the sweat lodge ceremony as group therapy for navajo youth

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Using the Sweat Lodge Ceremony as Group Therapy for Navajo Youth

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The sweat lodge ceremony can be seen as a culturally relevant approach to group therapy in working with Navajo youth. This article describes the sweat lodge ceremony used at a residential treatment center located on the Navajo Nation and compares the ceremony to modern group work by identifying Yalom's (1995) 11 therapeutic factors of group therapy within the ceremony. Other psychotherapeutic features of the ceremony also are discussed. In addition, considerations for widespread use of the ceremony with Native Americans and non-Native Americans are given as well as recommendations for future research.

Navajo and other Native American youth are at high risk for suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, school problems, car accidents, and family disruption (Beauvais, Oetting, & Wolf, 1989; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Cole, Timmereck, Page, & Woods, 1992; Lamarine, 1988). The school drop-out rate among Native Americans is 25%; the national average is 12% (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Native American suicide rates are the highest in the nation. Suicide rates for 10- to 14-year-old Native Americans are four times higher than those for 10- to 14-year-olds of all races (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Suicide is a major problem for Navajo youth. According to May and Van Winkle (1994), in their epidemiological study of Native American adolescent suicide in New Mexico, the overall rate of suicide for Navajo youth has risen; rates for other tribes have remained steady.

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Among the recommendations of the American Indian/Alaska Native Suicide Task Force Report (1996) was a call for validation of traditional healing and cultural diversity. In their review of literature and their observations of community interventions, the task force found that programs that used culturally relevant treatment strategies appeared to be more effective in preventing suicide than programs that did not use such strategies. The task force made the following recommendation: "Traditional healing methods and those of mainstream culture must be treated with equal respect. More often than not, the two systems are highly compatible and complementary " (p. 19).

Integrating culture with professional practice is an ethical responsibility. There is consensus among advocates of cross-cultural counseling that modern psychotherapy is based on a middle-class, Euro-American, highly individualistic, ethnocentric ethic, and practices of counseling need to be adapted to a multicultural perspective (Herr, 1991; Ivey, 1990; Ivey & Rigazio-DiGilio, 1991; Katz, 1985; Lee, 1991; Pedersen, 1985; Smith, 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990; Wren, 1985). The Ethical Guidelines for Group Counselors, set out by the Association for Specialists in Group Work (1990), clearly state that "Group counselors are aware of the necessity to modify their techniques to fit the unique needs of various cultural and ethnic groups."

Although there is little mention of race or ethnicity in the group work literature (Davis, 1981; Delucia, Coleman, & Jensen-Scott, 1992; Greeley, Garcia, Kessler, & Gilchrest, 1992; Helms, 1990), the usefulness of group work with youth rests on a very solid research foundation (Goldstein & Huff, 1993, cite Baumrind, 1975; Field, 1981; Guralnick, 1981; and Manaster, 1977; see also Moriarty & Toussieng, 1976; Rosenberg, 1975). The prominent Native American values of sharing, cooperation, and extended family orientation (Everett, Proctor, & Cortmell, 1980; Wise & Miller, 1983, as cited in Sue & Sue, 1990), make group work a promising modality in working with Native Americans. However, modern group work formats necessitate ways of interacting that are much different from how Native Americans interact in group situations (Merta, 1996). For example, behaviors fundamental to the counseling process, such as establishing good eye contact, discussing inner feelings, and verbalizing concerns, often are not displayed by Native Americans within a standard counseling format because they have not been socialized to do so (Sue & Sue, 1990).

One source of promoting mental health indigenous to Native Americans that seems highly compatible and complementary to modern group work is the sweat lodge ceremony. Indeed, several writers in the field have drawn similarities between modern group work and the sweat lodge ceremony (Lake, 1987; Mails, 1991; Quinn & Smith, 1992; Ross &

Ross, 1992; Walkingstick-Garrett & Osborne, 1995). For example, Walkingstick-Garrett and Osborne explained that the Native American sweat lodge ceremony is a widely practiced tradition that "honors the process of growth and healing central to modern-day practice of group counseling" (p. 33).

The purpose of this article is to describe the sweat lodge ceremony used as a treatment approach in working with Navajo youth with disruptive behavior disorders and to compare the ceremony to modern group work. The article is organized as follows: a review of literature on the sweat lodge, a description of the use of the sweat lodge ceremony at a residential treatment center located on the Navajo Nation, the application of Irvin Yalom's (1995) 11 therapeutic factors to the sweat lodge ceremony as well as the identification of other prominent therapeutic features within the ceremony, considerations for the widespread use of the sweat lodge ceremony, and a summary that offers recommendations for future research.

BACKGROUND ON THE SWEAT LODGE

Sweat baths, sweat houses, and sweat lodges have been used in many different cultures and by many Native American tribes. Vogel (1970) cited references of sweat baths as old Celtic and Teutonic practice; he noted its importance in tribes of Africa, Melanesia, New Guinea, and Polynesia, and even how it was practiced by the Aztecs. New World anthropologists, such as Speck among the Naskapi, Tanner among the Cree, and Luckert among the Navajo (as cited in Quinn & Smith, 1992), have reported the use of the sweat lodge in hunting rituals of purification. Quinn and Smith contended that it was in North America that the sweat bath procedures reached their highest development. The sweat lodge has been an important part of life for Native Americans and has been used for basic bathing, socialization, evening warmth, celebration, a cleansing of the body and mind, and preparation for war, hunting, marriage, or passage into adulthood (Quinn & Smith, 1992). Ross and Ross (1992) identified the sweat lodge as being a native custom designed to promote health. After their own sweat lodge experience, Ross and Ross made the following observations:

> In addition to the therapeutic value of an evening in a wilderness setting—sweating and cleansing—there was camaraderie, nourishing food and drink. In the dark heat of the sweat lodge, the ritual eased the worries of some and enhanced the self-esteem of others. During the process people shared their worries, they testified about their difficulties, and they ex-

> pressed their appreciation for the good things of life. The blessings of human relationships were especially acknowledged. (p. 297)

The building of group cohesion through the use of the sweat lodge has been reported by many prominent Native Americans. Fool's Crow spoke of the importance of socialization and friendship in the shared sweat lodge (Mails, 1991). Rolling Thunder spoke of the healing properties of laughing and enjoying one another's company in the sweat lodge (Mails, 1991). Boyd (1974) reported that after the sweat lodge experience with Rolling Thunder, "All of us who had done this together seemed to be of one mind" (p.137). Lake (1987) emphasized:

> The sweat lodge becomes a type of counseling center and place for group therapy; marriage and family problems are analyzed and remedied, personal problems discussed, inter-family conflicts are resolved, and problems involving fears, anxieties, and depressions are dealt with in a group way. (p. 8)

The sweat lodge has become part of many therapeutic procedures conducted by medicine people for physical ailments, such as psoriasis (a chronic inflammatory skin disease) and diabetes (Young, Ingram, & Swartz, 1989). Sweating aids in the elimination of wastes, such as urea and uric acid. It also stabilizes body temperature to survive demanding conditions. While employed as a therapist on the Navajo Nation for 2 years, the first author observed that Navajo social service and health department agencies as well as local correctional facilities used the sweat lodge routinely. Its use included the treatment of a wide array of problems, from physical ailments to problems of adolescent delinquency and substance abuse. Hall (1986), who surveyed 39 native alcohol treatment programs at random, found that half of the programs offered sweats on site or provided access to them. Hall attributed the popularity of the sweat to the fact that it is not necessarily religious, its use is flexible—either in conjunction with Alcoholics Anonymous or without, with residents or outpatients—and it produces powerful physical and mental experiences.

The sweat lodge also has been advocated for use in programs involving non-Natives. In their article advocating the potentials of sweat lodges for adventure education programs, Quinn and Smith (1992) described a number of groups sponsored by various growth and educational movements of the 1980s that have made use of the Native American sweat lodge experience. They explained that sweats were used for improving group cohesiveness and interpersonal bonding. Traditionally, for the Navajo, every family had a sweat lodge, tucked out of sight of the dwellings for privacy; many still do. Some extended families have

separate sweathouses for men and women; otherwise, the two use the same sweathouse at different times. Some Navajo people reported to the authors that they participate regularly in the sweat lodge to keep their lives in balance and harmony.

Although there are many variations in how ceremonies are conducted, Native Americans seem to regard certain factors as fundamental to the sweat lodge experience. Walkingstick-Garrett and Osborne (1995) explained:

> Though techniques for the sweat lodge ceremony vary from tribe to tribe, the ceremony serves an important function through purification and healing for all who participate in it. From the skin, bodily toxins and negative energy are released. Similarly, from the mind and spirit, toxins such as anger, frustration, hurt, or anxiety are released. Ways of dealing with various situations, with others, and with oneself are talked about within the framework of the Universal Circle represented by the sweat lodge and its sacred Ceremony. (p.35)

DESCRIPTION OF A NAVAJO-OWNED RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT CENTER

The first author's experience in working with the Navajo people has been the result of working as a therapist for the Alchini Binitsekees Naholzhooh Foundation (ABN). ABN operates out of a wing in the Chuska, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Boarding School on the Navajo Nation in Tohatchi, New Mexico. Tohatchi is about 30 miles north of Gallup, New Mexico. The phrase "Alchini Binitsekees Naholzhooh" translates to "restoring the children's thinking back to harmony." ABN is one of the only residential treatment centers for children located on an Indian reservation. The Chuska school board created ABN in 1992. Prior to the existence of ABN, children living on the Navajo reservation who were identified as being seriously emotionally disturbed commonly would be sent off to treatment centers in cities several hundred miles away from their homes, families, and cultural way of life.

ABN maintains ten to fifteen Navajo boys ranging in age from 6 to 15. Most initially are referred to ABN by teachers because of frequent fighting and constant refusal to follow rules. In terms of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), the boys most commonly receive diagnosis of dysthymia and/or one or more of the disruptive behavior disorders: oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Abuse and neglect usually characterize the boys' home lives. Their length of stay at ABN ranges anywhere from 1 month to 2 years. In

addition to a 24-hour behavior management system; special education services; and individual, group, and family therapy; a sweat lodge ceremony occurs weekly. Incorporating the sweat lodge ceremony as a regular occurring activity at ABN was an attempt to offer Navajo traditional healing ways that promote mental health.

The Sweat Lodge

The sweat lodge used at ABN is a dome-like structure about 8 feet in diameter. Willow and oak branches comprise the frame. Earth, canvas, and nylon cover the frame. Inside, in the center of the lodge, is a small pit about 1.5 feet in diameter and 1 foot deep. This small pit is where the rocks used to heat the lodge are kept. A large fire a few yards from the entrance of the lodge is used to heat the rocks. Using all the elements of the world—rocks, fire, water, earth, and air—and always oriented on an east-west axis, the sweat lodge is replete with complex ritual and symbolism.

ABN's Navajo traditional counselor leads the ceremony. The traditional counselor is a 42-year-old Navajo man who has lived all of his life on the Navajo reservation. He has had considerable training and experience in the use of the sweat lodge. A Navajo medicine man trained and initiated him to facilitate sweat lodge ceremonies. The ceremony takes place about 5 miles north of the ABN facility at the home of an extended family member of the traditional counselor.

The boys' parents or guardians had signed informed consent form(s) before the boys could participate in the ceremonies. Next, the boys received didactic instruction on the sweat lodge by the traditional counselor. Then, the boys walked through a sweat lodge without the use of the hot rocks. Particular emphasis was stressed on safety. For example, the boys received instructions to inform the nearest staff person if they felt unable to bear the heat. A staff person would then carefully guide them outside of the lodge. The staff encourage the boys to participate in setting up for the ceremony by holding them responsible for gathering the wood and bringing the water to the ceremony site.

The Ceremony

Those who participate in the ceremonies include the boys, various levels of ABN staff, and often local community members. The boys were separated into two groups based on age and level of sophistication. Each group had a sweat done every other week. Staff maintain a staff-to-client ratio of 1:3 during the ceremony. The size of a group doing the ceremony averages at about ten. The ceremony breaks down into four

intervals called "rounds." The length of a round varies from about 15 minutes up to 1 hour, with an average of about 25 minutes. The facilitator determines the length of each round based on factors such as his perception of the participants' reaction to the heat and the complexity of the issue being confronted. Before the first round begins, nine hot rocks are placed in the lodge. The nine rocks symbolize the number of months lived in the mother's womb. The group participants file into the lodge clockwise and sit in a circle. After the leader orders that the door flap be dropped, plunging the group into darkness, he discloses that the purpose of the first round is to pray or meditate for resolving a personal problem one is experiencing or bettering oneself in general. The leader then directs the participants to introduce themselves, while a rolled corn husk filled with special mountain tobacco circulates to each participant to smoke. The leader then asks each participant to state his name, his clan, and to disclose his reason for coming to the Ceremony or a goal for self-improvement. Often, the boys will say that they want to stop getting into fights with other kids, to better listen to staff, or just to behave better. The leader then will address a common issue related to the participants' concerns in an effort to promote a helpful understanding. For example, often the leader will reflect on the similarities between enduring the heat in the sweat lodge and enduring the daily frustrations that provoke the boys' identified problem behaviors. The leader attempts to help the boys develop a more internal locus of control by instilling the belief that, "If I can stay seated in the sweat lodge for the full round, although I'm uncomfortably hot, then I have the tolerance to avoid hitting other kids when they do something I don't like, comply with staff requests, and not be disruptive in class."

The leader then pours a special mixture of water and herbs over the heated rocks. Hissing and steaming, blasts of hot steam fill the darkened interior of the lodge. The leader then tells everyone to bless themselves with the steam. The heat is intense and the participants sweat profusely. In unison, the participants then pray out loud for several minutes for the resolution of their personal identified problem, elaborating on the problem and describing how they would like the situation to improve. For the remainder of the first round, the participants pray or meditate on overcoming their problems while singing a sacred song. The songs promote traditional values such as living in a socially responsible way and respecting the environment. For the beginner, the minutes going by seem like an eternity. When the last song ends, the leader orders that the door flap be lifted and that the participants exit the lodge in a clockwise direction.

The group then takes about a 5-minute break in which they drink water and often pour water on each other to cool off. Once out of the

lodge, the participants again begin interacting more spontaneously. There is a strong sense of camaraderie as the participants tell each other how they felt during the round and congratulate one another for completing it. The boys usually brag to each other and to the staff about how brave and strong they were for being able to withstand the heat. During the break, the leader's assistant places more hot rocks in the lodge one by one with a pitchfork in preparation for the second round.

The remaining rounds are very similar to the first but take on different themes. Symbolizing puberty in the second round are 11 to 13 rocks. The leader often informs the participants that the purpose of the second round is to pray for one's immediate family members. Before the singing begins, those wishing to do so will tell the group about a problem related to their immediate family. Typical problems disclosed include telling of a family member's drinking problem or the grief one is experiencing due to a recent death. Eighteen rocks used in the third round symbolize the beginning of adulthood. In contrast to the second round, the theme of the third round is to pray for one's extended relatives. The mountain song sung in the third round is in honor of the six sacred mountains. These mountains mark Navajo sacred land and represent a symbol of strength for the Navajo.

The number of rocks used in the fourth round does not have symbolic significance. Rather, as many as can be safely placed inside the pit are piled in. The boys usually request that the fourth and last round be the hottest and longest, making it the most difficult round to complete. The general purpose of the fourth round is to pray for one's future, but it is less structured and more open for participants to discuss anything they like. However, as in the previous rounds, when one person is talking, the others show respect by listening and remaining quiet. Topics addressed in the fourth round often include: thanking everyone for their participation, focusing on what occurred during the ceremony, and disclosing what the individual prayed for. Often sung during the fourth round is the "Protection Way Song." The meaning of this song is to pray for the protection of all the members from any possible dangers they may encounter. Once outside the lodge, the leader directs the participants to bow down, straighten, and reach out toward the north, south, east, and west in an attempt to absorb positive energy from the earth, sun, and all living things. The participants then shake hands and congratulate one another for having completed the ceremony.

COMPARISON TO MODERN GROUP WORK

The following includes a comparison of the sweat lodge ceremony to modern group work by identifying Yalom's (1995) 11 therapeutic factors

of group therapy within the ceremony. These factors are Instillation of Hope, Universality, Imparting of Information, Altruism, the Corrective Recapitulation of the Primary Family Group, Development of Socializing Techniques, Imitative Behavior, Interpersonal Learning, Group Cohesiveness, Catharsis, and Existential Factors. Also included is a discussion of other prominent features of the sweat lodge ceremony that seem therapeutic in working with Navajo youth with disruptive behavior disorders. These features include the fact that the ceremony is used much like an experiential group activity, that it helps to promote moral-cognitive development, and that it has been helpful in strengthening cultural identity.

Instillation of Hope

The traditional Native American has strong faith in the sweat lodge ceremony as a powerful treatment. For example, two spiritual beliefs that the boys reported to the authors were that one's ancestors become available to listen and help through use of the ceremony, and that the special rocks, water, and songs used in the ceremony bless and help protect the participants. As one boy whose parents are deceased put it, when talking in the sweat lodge, "It's like I'm speaking with my parents."

Universality and Catharsis

Yalom (1995) emphasized the interdependency of these two factors. He explained that it is not the sheer process of ventilation or the learning that one is not alone in having certain problems, exclusively, that is important. Rather, what is important is the sharing of one's inner world with the acceptance of others. One of the most prominent therapeutic effects observed during the ceremony is that those boys who often are seen as having little insight into their own motivations suddenly appear very wise when participating in the sweat lodge ceremony. Indeed, for many of the boys at ABN, the sweat lodge seems to have been the only place where they have shared their deepest concerns with another human being. For example, the boys often find comfort in the similarity of strong emotions expressed related to chaotic conditions at home and lost loved ones. In the sweat lodge ceremony, respect is highly regarded. When one discloses a concern, the group responds only with acceptance and appreciation of their participation. To encourage increased depth of disclosure, there are no threatening follow-up questions. Such attempts would be considered rude and likely would result in the child refusing to make future disclosures. The emphasis on acceptance and appreciation seems to have been especially helpful in working with the boys who have

oppositional defiant disorder. Kaplan, Sadock, and Grebb (1994) suggested that the important aspect of the therapeutic relationship when treating children with oppositional defiant disorder is a fostering of autonomy and independence so that the child can understand the self-destructive nature of his or her defenses against intrusion and control and can then express him or herself directly.

Imparting of Information

The sweat lodge traditionally has been a place for storytelling, which is an important means of imparting information for Native Americans. The stories both entertain and promote edification. They often include themes stressing the importance of living in a healthy, socially responsible way.

Altruism

The boys show altruism for one another by helping to set up for the ceremony, praying for one another, and being supportive of each other's problems. Between rounds, the boys often help to cool one another off by pouring water on one another and cooperatively holding large water jugs for one another to drink from.

The Corrective Recapitulation of the Primary Family Group

At first glance, it may be difficult to identify this factor within the ceremony because it is not clear that transference from family member to group member or leader occurs. Given the dysfunctional and capricious nature of the families from which most of these boys come, it should not be surprising to find the boys identifying with and transferring on to the various adults within the ceremony. The fact that all of the boys, regardless of clan, refer to the traditional counselor as "grandfather" is a good example of such transference. Given the supportive and consistent behaviors of the participating adult members, the ceremony would appear to provide ample opportunity for boys to have "corrective emotional experiences" as an outcome of participating in the ceremony.

The Development of Socializing Techniques

As previously stated, Native Americans interact in a much different manner in group situations compared to Anglo Americans. In the authors' experience, for the Navajo, feedback occurs in a much less spontaneous way and with the absence of open disagreement. The traditional

counselor often instructs the boys on proper social skills when participating in the ceremony. For example, the boys learn to be helpfully responsive to one another by being taught to respect each other's problems by silently attending and not interrupting. Also, the traditional counselor frequently gives the boys opportunities to practice speaking in a genuine manner to the group and strongly encourages the transfer of this learning to treatment planning meetings and family therapy sessions.

Imitative Behavior

Several traditional Navajo healers have emphasized to the authors the importance of adult role models being involved in the ceremonies. The adults involved in the ceremony serve as model-setting participants for the boys. For example, the adults model respect and disclose their genuine concerns for themselves and families as well as for all of the participants' personal improvement. Observing the adults' reverence for the sweat lodge ceremony seems to have been very helpful in the development of the boys' approaching the ceremony in a serious manner.

Interpersonal Learning

Interpersonal learning, one of Yalom's (1995) major therapeutic factors, is dependent on a group member disclosing a parataxic distortion or exhibiting some inappropriate or dysfunctional behavior in group that characterizes her or his normal thinking and functioning outside of group (social microcosm); receiving feedback, negative as well as positive, from other group members, with the member then responding with catharsis, insight, and commitment to behavioral change. If these conditions are met, the group member is likely to undergo a corrective emotional experience, in which he or she will correct that original parataxic distortion and then exhibit more appropriate behaviors. If a corrective emotional experience is dependent on conflict resolution, then there is a question as to whether interpersonal learning occurs in a sweat lodge ceremony.

There are ample anecdotal reports in the multicultural counseling literature to suggest that Native Americans, in general, are uncomfortable with conflict. Merta (1996) summarized these reports as follows: "Differences in verbal and nonverbal communication between Native Americans and Anglo Americans may complicate or impede the group process, and a preference for group harmony and cooperative behavior may render group conflict totally unacceptable to many Native Americans" (p. 575). Consequently, it is not surprising to observe group

members in the sweat lodge responding to an individual member's disclosure or behavior with only positive feedback or passive acceptance. Through the use of support rather than conflict, the boys seem more willing to share their problems among each other. This results in their gaining a more adaptable understanding and acceptance of their concerns and a willingness to change. Based on Bednar and Kaul's (1994) extensive review of the research literature on group therapy, there appears to be some question as to the effectiveness of negative feedback. Bednar and Kaul summarized the research by stating that group participants, regardless of ethnicity or other demographic variables, appeared to prefer positive to negative feedback and that group members find it easier to give positive feedback.

Group Cohesiveness

The importance of strong group cohesiveness is so profound that once the ceremony concludes, the participants consider one another as being brothers. This aspect of the ceremony has been helpful in developing meaningful relationships between the staff and children, with the staff acting more like mentors for the boys than like detached attendants.

Existential Factors

Teachings occurring during the ceremony often include recognizing the importance of living one's life in a moral way and that ultimately there is no escape from some of life's pain and from death. The boys also learn that one's life stays in balance and harmony by participating regularly in the ceremony.

EXPERIENTIAL GROUP ACTIVITIES, MORAL-COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Experiential Group Activities

Experiential programs generally involve placing participants in therapeutic groups and presenting them with a series of sequential and challenging experiences related to treatment, focusing on the transfer of what has been learned in these activities and into the clients' lifestyles of recovery (Gass, 1993). As previously described, the sweat lodge leader often facilitates better understanding of abstract process concepts, such as a low frustration tolerance and group cohesion, by demonstrating them in concrete ways. From week to week, the boys often report on their

progress toward incorporating what they have learned in the sweat lodge into their day-to-day lives.

Moral-Cognitive Development

A main therapeutic effect of the sweat lodge ceremony seems to be in the area of moral-cognitive development. Tolan and Cohler (1993) explained that youth with disruptive behavior disorders have an underdeveloped internal psychological structure, which causes them to express themselves through action rather than to experience symptoms. They contended that a general goal of treatment is to convert symptomatic behaviors into an internal psychological experience and thereby eliminate their destructiveness. Several of the boys reported to the authors of this article that the main purpose of the sweat lodge ceremony was to reflect on their personal concerns in a serious way. It seems likely that the process of praying and meditating in the ceremony aids the boys in developing their internal psychological structure so that they can better delineate thought and feeling from activity and behavior.

One specific psychological function that the ceremony appears to help develop is frustration tolerance. The sweat lodge leader often will reflect on the similarities between enduring the heat in the sweat lodge and enduring the daily frustrations that provoke the boys' identified problem behaviors. One boy explained that by being able to endure the heat, "The spirit then goes in you and helps you gain better control of yourself." Another boy explained, "If you get angry and try to fight the heat, it gets hotter, but, if you work with the heat by relaxing and making yourself calm, it's not that bad."

Not only are the boys aided in developing the ability to stop and think before acting but they also are taught to think in a moralistic way. For example, throughout the ceremony the leader subjects the boys to discussions of moral reasoning and the benefits of prayer and how to pray. A substantial amount of the ceremony is spent praying. There is a growing body of research that concerns the formation and development of morality through prayer. For example, Finney and Malony (1985) contended that studies on the development of the concept of prayer generally have found patterns consistent with Piaget's stages of moral and cognitive development. Fernquist (1995) found that prayer and church attendance were associated with both victim and victimless delinquency. Montgomery and Francis (1996) found a positive relation between personal prayer and a positive attitude toward school in 11- to 16-year-olds. One boy reported to the authors, "I pray that my mom will stop drinking and for me to get better and be able to live at home."

Cultural Identity

The ceremony seems to be especially helpful in strengthening the boys' sense of cultural identity and thereby promotes personal pride. Sue and Sue (1990) explained that developing a sense of identity is an especially difficult task for Native Americans. They contended that Native American children and adolescents not only face the developmental problems faced by all young people but they are also subjected to numerous cultural conflicts, as well. They are caught between expectations of their elders to maintain traditional values and the necessity to adapt to the majority culture. Sue and Sue proposed that this may be a main stressor influencing the high rates of truancy, school failure, drug use, and suicide for Native American youth. By being able to participate in a traditional ceremony with their elders, in which the elders facilitate an experiential learning experience that applies traditional values to current activities (e.g., studying hard, obeying elders at school and home, getting along with peers), the boys are given the opportunity to integrate the two cultures in a personal way; in so doing, they can achieve greater cultural identity and self-esteem.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WIDESPREAD USE

The preceding description of the ceremony offers recommendations for incorporating the sweat lodge ceremony as a treatment component in working with Navajo and other Native American youth. Using this sacred Native American ritual and ceremony requires careful preprogram planning and an in-depth understanding of the sweat lodge ceremony. In the authors' experience, Native American representatives require that sweat lodges be built and ceremonies be facilitated by only Native American people qualified to do so. The Navajo Nation currently is developing standardized certification requirements for the Navajo to facilitate sweat lodge ceremonies, due to numerous injuries occurring in ceremonies conducted by persons unqualified to do so. Meanwhile, sweat lodges are becoming increasingly popular in mainstream culture. In fact, a recent *Newsweek* article lists "de-stressing at Native American sweat lodges" as a trendy thing to do (Hamilton, 1997, p. 59). However, the sweat lodge ceremony is a sacred ritual to Native Americans. Therefore, it is likely that many Native American representatives would strongly object to non-Native American groups proposing to use the sweat lodge ceremony. What has better potential for widespread use with non-Natives is to combine the sweating process with

psychotherapy and to leave aside all other sacred ritualistic aspects of the ceremony. The sweating process in the ceremony requires mental and physical fortitude, bringing with it a strong sense of accomplishment, thus providing an ideal vehicle for those who want to commit to change. For use with non-Natives, a sweat therapy session could take place in a sauna or sauna-like structure rather than in a sweat lodge. Modern group work formats could be adjusted to be integrated with the sweating process to accommodate select populations.

SUMMARY

Factors reflecting social disintegration and symptoms of individuals in despair have soared among Native Americans . Modern treatment modalities are not well adapted to accommodate Native Americans. Psychotherapy formats necessitate ways of interacting that are much different from how Native Americans interact. More consideration needs to be given to the use of culturally relevant treatment strategies. To do so meets an ethical responsibility and appears to be more effective. The sweat lodge ceremony has been an important part of life for many Native American tribes and traditionally has had many uses, including promoting mental health.

This article describes the use of the sweat lodge ceremony for Navajo youth with disruptive behavior disorders. Particular emphasis focuses on comparing the ceremony to modern group work by applying Yalom's (1995) 11 therapeutic factors to the ceremony. Of these factors, those that seemed more readily apparent in the ceremony were Instillation of Hope, Universality, Imparting of Information, Altruism, Development of Socializing Techniques, Imitative Behavior, Group Cohesiveness, Catharsis, and Existential Factors. Although there seems to be ample opportunity for transference from family member to group member or leader to occur, it was difficult to identify the Corrective Recapitulation of the Primary Family Group within the ceremony. Interpersonal Learning was not readily apparent in the ceremony due to the seeming absence of group members working through conflict among one another. However, group members demonstrating catharsis, insight, and commitment to behavioral change were apparent in the ceremony. Therefore, it seems that Interpersonal Learning did occur in the ceremony, but through support rather than conflict. A recent literature review questions the usefulness of group conflict at all (Bednar & Kaul, 1994). Other therapeutic features identified as being prominent in the ceremony were that the ceremony is used much like an experiential group activity,

promotes moral-cognitive development, and fortifies cultural identity. As is done in experiential group work, the sweat lodge participants were placed in therapeutic groups and were presented with a challenging experience (enduring the intense heat in the sweat lodge), which the leader related to their treatment. Moral-cognitive development was described as being promoted through the practice of prayer and meditation, the development of frustration tolerance, and through discussions of moral reasoning. Greater cultural identity was described as being achieved by the boys' ability to participate in a traditional ceremony with their elders, in which the elders apply traditional values to contemporary activities.

Based on the first author's observations, those boys enrolled at ABN who regularly participated in the sweat lodge ceremony made more progress in treatment than those who did not. There is a need for quantitative research that measures the effectiveness of the sweat lodge ceremony with Navajo youth. Such research should be quantitative in nature, make use of a control group, and apply such short-term dependent variables as behavior modification grading, measures of school progress, and the frequency and severity of problem behaviors, as well as long-term or follow-up dependent variables (e.g., parent rating forms, teacher rating forms, and the frequency and severity of legal problems and school disciplinary actions).

To enhance our understanding of which of Yalom's (1995) therapeutic factors may be most prominent during a ceremony, there is a need for qualitative research as pioneered by Bloch, Reibstein, Crouch, Holroyd, and Themen (1979) and further refined by Kivlighan & Mullison (1988), in which participants are asked to identify the aspect of the sweat lodge ceremony they perceived as being most beneficial. Preference should be given to having Navajos be interviewed in their native language. In addition, there is a need for quantitative research that also seeks to identify these therapeutic factors. Lese and MacNair-Semands (1997) are developing a questionnaire for measuring the therapeutic factors in group work that might prove useful in researching the sweat lodge ceremony.

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